



Myanmar as a Potential Candidate for SAARC: Pave to Political and Economic Integration (PEI) with Bangladesh

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Abstract

Being neighbors, both Bangladesh and Myanmar (formerly Burma), although they possess potential opportunity for political and economic integration, have very limited economic, geographic and strategic cooperation over time. There are some key factors- long standing disputes over maritime boundary (now resolved) and the Rohingya Refugee problem over the decades, behind this unwillingness for being liberal in economic transactions through business and trade. Also the border (land) between Bangladesh and Myanmar occupies significant attention. This border is viewed as one of the top smuggling routes of the world.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) for political and economic cooperation in South Asia, was given its institutional and organizational framework in 1985. SAARC is an economic and geographical organization comprised of eight countries- Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan of South and Southeast Asia, consisting of 21% of the world's total population and occupy 3% of the world's area. In terms of GDP, the economy of SAARC represents the third largest in the world. Based on the aim "to work together in a spirit of friendship, trust and understanding" and "to accelerate the process of economic and social development in member states," SAARC has been becoming a hub of international attention for political, economic and geographic integration.

Being included in SAARC, Myanmar will be able to expand its business and trade horizons in wider aspects, which in turn will benefit its national economy. On the other hand, as a neighbor, Bangladesh will be able to gain its market in Myanmar. As Bangladesh and Myanmar have very good ways of communication (both land and water), both the countries can gain the most from the economic integration. Combined sea-ports for both countries can be the landmark for further development in trade and commerce with the rest of the globe. The mutual off-shore resource exploration and exploitation can build the base for escaping the fuel crisis. And finally, this, in turn, will be coordinated with ASEAN, BIMSTEC and BCIM as well.

Background



Bangladesh and Myanmar are the neighboring countries located in South-East Asia showered by the Bay of Bengal. Myanmar's membership to SAARC can play a role in its political and economic integration with Bangladesh. Its membership in SAARC would bring a sure gateway for building vibrant socio-economic linkages between the two neighbors.

Research Objectives

- to know the potentiality of Myanmar for SAARC membership,
- to explore the political and economic interests of Bangladesh and Myanmar for being integrated with each other, and
- to find out the obstacles and challenges for the integration.

Myanmar in SAARC: Potentiality and Road to Gain

- Long history of close cultural relations and social exchange and a shared experience of colonialism under British Domination,
- Allows for more and open boundaries for regional cooperation,
- Myanmar can inject the ASEAN* thought and aspirations into the SAARC, while Bangladesh can do the same from SAARC to ASEAN, which in turn may fuse aspects of socio-cultural and economic development.

*ASEAN—Association of Southeast Asian Nations



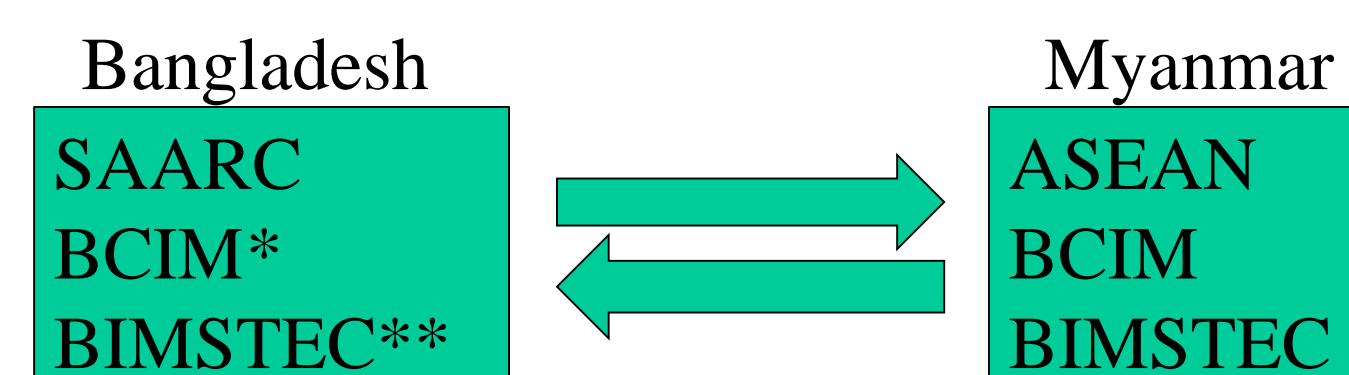
Interests of Integration

- Stable border situation and control of smuggling,
- Land and maritime business and trade expansion,
- A sustainable coastal development,
- Fishing and off-shore resource exploration,
- Disaster preparedness and response , and
- Mitigation of Rohingya Problem



1. Bangladeshi prime-minister Sheikh Hasina and Myanmar's president Thein Sein, and 2. Sheikh Hasina with Aung San Suu Kyi- the opposition leader of Myanmar.

SAARC- ASEAN- BIMSTEC- BCIM



BIMSTEC and BCIM can build a practical and desirable bridge between SAARC and ASEAN. In the coming future, Cooperation between SAARC, ASEAN, BCIM and BIMSTEC can take the form of joint marketing, and regional cooperation for dealing with non-tariff barriers and coordination for further development of the region.

*BCIM Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation

**BIMSTEC Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation



Challenges for Integration

- Border Dispute between the neighbors,
- Smuggling in Arakan-Chittagong Border,
- Prolonged Rohingya Problem,
- Myanmar's close ties with China may discourage India to receive Myanmar in SAARC,
- Internal political environment of Myanmar.

Initiatives for fostering the integration

- Creation of a Border Management Forum
- Increase in Trade, and Development of road and water ways communication,
- Control on Arms Smuggling may attract India (as a major player) to receive Myanmar in SAARC,
- Political Will is a necessary

Conclusion

PEI is a process, which may require a significant amount of time. The emancipation of integration would pave the way for the journey and, although the internal political situation and parties and their views may differ, the greater incentive of a successful Political and Economic Integration (PEI) may lead the region to an Economic Union at last.

References

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- Map-2:
<http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=map%20of%20%20Bangladesh%20and%20Myanmar%20altogether&q=sn&form=QBIR&pq=map%20of%20bangladesh%20and%20myanmar%20altogether&sc=0-23&sp=-1&sk=&id=10D15E46DA96201B8BB64355D41B7D15A7558981&selectedIndex=0#view=detail&id=10D15E46DA96201B8BB64355D41B7D15A7558981&selectedIndex=0>
- Photo-1:
<http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=photo+of+hasina+and+thein+sein&id=0ABFF6873592715F5EB8304D00435C7FD712D865&FORM=IQFRBA#view=detail&id=0ABFF6873592715F5EB8304D00435C7FD712D865&selectedIndex=0>
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